

## devil's in the backseat by ceruleanstorm

**Series:** (something strange in your neighborhood) [2]

**Category:** Stranger Things (TV 2016)

**Genre:** F/M, Fluff, Mike's up to something, Miscommunication, The Gang - Freeform, dustin max and lucas have a gambling problem, high school fic, they're high school seniors just so you know

**Language:** English

**Characters:** Dustin Henderson, Eleven, Lucas Sinclair, Max (Stranger Things), Mike Wheeler, Will Byers, a background of random high schoolers (for dramatic effect)

**Relationships:** Eleven & Mike Wheeler, Eleven/Mike Wheeler

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**Summary:**

“So you’re saying that Mike is cheating on El, but with science?” Lucas raised an eyebrow. “Do you know how stupid you sound right now?”

“Hey, I atleast I think it’s possible. Maybe he thinks science is sexy or something. Don’t judge Sinclair, that’s rude.”

“So now you’re saying Mike was seduced by science? Do you hear yourself?”

“Yes Lucas,” Dustin cocked his head as if this whole thing was obvious. “I’m putting fifty bucks on this has more to do with science than with anything else.”

- Mike Wheeler is not a bad boy, but when he comes to school in a leather jacket, it’s the only thing anyone can talk about. Eleven knows something is up- if only he would stop avoiding her long enough for her to ask. Max, Dustin, and Lucas may have a gambling

problem, and Will's caught in the middle of it all, stuck keeping everyone's secrets.

# 1. tell me if you taste my motives (i think i like you in the moment)

## Author's Note:

okay so I've been planning this story since last February. I got this idea randomly and my first thought was "THIS HAS TO BE A THING. MAKE IT A THING." So now that things are better (read if these walls could talk for more details on that) and I have a lot of time on my hand to write, it can finally be a thing.

Yes, I am writing Max, because without her the story would be flatter. So her characterization is a complete shot in the dark, with very little to go off of. But I tried my best. Oh, and I know Max is supposed to be in some kind of love triangle with Dustin and Lucas, but I felt it was best to leave that to the suffer bros. Max's character is one of the many things I'm looking forward to in season 2.

Enjoy!- Savannah

Mike Wheeler was *not* a bad boy.

That didn't mean he was automatically off the boyfriend list, or that he wasn't good looking, according to his current girlfriend (who thought the exact opposite).

But it did mean that he never ditched school (okay, at least when there wasn't a monster and or said girlfriend on the loose) and he never forgot his homework, or cheated on *anything* , and that he couldn't play a sport to save his life. At eighteen, he still wore "dorky" clothing, which his girlfriend A), insisted that they were cute, and B), stole whenever she could sneak something, he still held

his title as Dungeon Master, and never had been considered “cool” enough to be offered any drugs or invited to any parties. He once was given a cigarette from Lucas- who got the pack from God knows where, probably one of his baseball buddies, but he only choked after a couple of puffs and then threw up, swearing the tobacco infested death traps off before his girlfriend could kill him herself. Mike never went looking for trouble (again, unless there was a monster just waltzing through town). He was the Science Departments pride and joy, and not to mention, their class valedictorian.

So why in the hell, had he come to school in a leather jacket?

Eleven, who was just El to most of the student body at Hawkins High School, had yet to see her boyfriend in the jacket (to her misfortune) and had heard the rumors about it through the *last* source she wanted it from. Her day previous to that had been spent rushing her sleepy brother out the door because they were already ten minutes late to first period (Will was so tired on the drive there, he would’ve hit a speeding motorcycle had El not maneuvered the car out of the oncoming lane) only to find out their teacher hadn’t even shown up for homeroom and went back to the car where Will was taking a nap. Quiet as a mouse, El then weaved her way in out of classes through the morning until she came to her off period before lunch, which she spent as a library aid for Mrs. Gaines.

She waved to Mrs. Gaines in her office as she entered the school’s library, throwing her bag down behind the checkout desk and grabbing the cart of books to be reshelfed, her mind already wandering.

The only class she shared with Mike that semester was her honors English class, their last period before senior release. With such limited time together, Mike and El did their best to meet up during

passing periods (and it had made them late to class sometimes) to at least *see* each other before lunch. Mike, however was missing from their usual hiding spots, for the third day in a row, El realized with a sigh before stepping out of the hiding spot, having already waited three minutes past the bell. The first day, El brushed it off, believing he had gotten caught in helping the freshman biology teacher or that he and Dustin ended up getting in another “discussion” with their calculus teacher. She didn’t bother to ask when she came into English and he kissed her on the cheek. The second day pissed El off, and she ignored him during a 45 minute lecture on Shakespeare. He hadn’t returned her call from the night before, and was not usually so involved with everyone else to skip a second day. When he didn’t come the third day, a sense dread crawled up El’s spine. This was unusual, even for Mike, so she made up her mind to get an answer out of him in class that day.

A past filled with more often than not, manipulative and abusive communication from figures who still haunted her nightmares, El spent more time than most planning conversations in her head to catch herself incase she made any grammatical errors or used a word wrong. She pictured Mike at his desk up against her own, and pulling out his colorful annotated copy of *Hamlet* and notebook paper, checking the chalk board for their warm up. Carefully inserting each of the books from the library return slot back into their homes on the wooden library shells in the present, she pictured herself sitting next to him, their hands finding each other like usual, and trying to break his focus simply by asking him how his day was. Then she could get to the “Is everything okay? You’ve been skipping our meetings for three days.”

El let out a long sigh and pressed her forehead onto one of the bookshelves. The rational part of her said he was merely goofing off and his forgetfulness came from an innocent source. But the emotional and chaotic part of her mind stirred up trouble, fretting about whether something had happened to him and he was keeping the truth from her. *Is Troy following him again?* She bit her fingernail. *I could have sworn he’d been suspended after crashing Mike’s car... God,*

*if that mouthbreather laid one finger on him, I'll-*

"He walked me to class today." El heard a group of girls giggle from a table near the bookshelf. She stood on her tiptoes, peering through the opening on top of the books, and a sudden feeling of plainness washed over her. She touched her slightly wavy, dark brunette ponytail, watching the girls laugh and their perfect curls bouncing as they leaned and whispered another secret. El didn't prefer to wear a lot of makeup, not having to put it on in the morning meant she could get a few extra minutes of sleep, sticking to a simple regime of mascara and lip gloss. Compared to these girls, she was terribly underdressed; their brightly colored eyeshadow was brought out by long black falsies and cherry red lips, matching their high-end clothes that Hopper and Joyce's budget could only dream of affording.

"He's so hot in that damn jacket." A redheaded girl laughed, flicking those perfect curls over her shoulder and popping her gum loudly.

Oh. They were just gossiping about boys. Her onslaught of insecurity melted away as she returned back to her reshelving.

"What is it with you and leather jackets, Becky?" A blonde with long pink fingernails asked the redhead. Still eavesdropping, El began to push the cart down the aisle.

"Wouldn't you like to know, Shannon? It's not like you weren't totally eyeing him up and down." The red head, Becky, glared at her friend Shannon.

"I've never seen him before," A third girl whose brown locks bounced

when she spoke. Shannon nodded. "Is he a new student?"

Shaking her head and giving a mischievous smile, Becky shook her head. "Actually, he's a senior here."

"And in that jacket, he is totally out of your league, Becky. There's no way you could get a hot senior like that. If you couldn't get Ryan, then there's no way." Shannon rolled her eyes and flipped her hair. El tilted her head watching them, wondering if she had somehow stepped into the movie *Grease*.

"Oh and you could? Which one of us was he talking to today, because I don't remember that being *you*."

For the most part, El was only half-eavesdropping on the girls. A part of her was curious; she'd yet to see a boy in a leather jacket in the senior class, but to be honest, she hadn't spent much time looking at other boys. It did sound like something maybe Lucas would do; girls loved Lucas, flocking to him, but he had yet to date one of them, hyper-fixated on his army recruitment. But she filed this conversation away. She could definitely tease him about this later.

"All he said was 'Hi.' That doesn't count, Becky." Shannon spat back. El held in a laugh, slipping another book back into a slot. Next on her cart was a battered copy of Stephen King's *It*. Knowing Mike had checked the book out recently (when he was still on the face of the planet), she opened the cover. Mike would at times slip notes into the books he checked out with the knowledge that El was shelving them. If she had recommended the book, he would give his own critiques, but most of the time he just wrote little silly tangents and facts or drew something that would make her smile. El kept all the notes in a shoebox under her bed.

*"You were right,"* The paper read in Mike's chicken scratch.

"I wanna know what's so amazing about this boy. Especially if I've never heard of him." The third girl with the bouncy brown curls piped up in a shrill voice.

*"This was terrifying. Why did you let me read this knowing I'm afraid of clowns?"* El let out a little laugh, stuffing the note in her skirt's pocket. She *had* warned him.

"Oh, a senior boy you haven't slept with, Janet? That's a surprise." Out of the corner of her vision, El saw Becky roll her eyes, again.

"Well, what's his damn name? He might just be on the list, for all you know." Janet fired back.

El made a move to hoist the giant book onto the bookshelf when she heard Becky giggle. "Mike Wheeler. Isn't that the cutest?"

The book dropped with a *thud* ! capturing the attention of Becky, Shannon, and Janet, and El was forced to quickly move behind the bookshelf, her mind going a mile a minute. *Why are they talking about Mike? Mike's the hot senior in the leather jacket? Of course Mike's hot but when the hell did he get a leather jacket? And why are they even talking about him what the hell is going on?*

El could feel her face reddening in frustration. Making a move to



climb out of her hiding spot, she was about to peer through the shelves again when she heard a loud *Pop!* behind her.

“Whatcha doin’?” El whirled around to find her friend Max standing behind, loudly chewing bubblegum and smirking. El let out of breath she didn’t know she was holding. She had been Max’s friend for years, and knew Max had a love of surprising people, and with her powers she should’ve been able to catch Max. But she’d been so engrossed in why Becky-Shannon-Janet was talking about her boyfriend.

“You’re not supposed to chew gum in the library.” El scolded Max in a whisper. Max blew another pink bubble and shrugged.

“Who are you spying on?” asked Max, trying to peer over her shoulder. “Those three? Why?”

“Max, spit out your gum.” El tried again.

Shaking her head and crossing her arms, Max feigned a whine. “But it’s a brand new piece, El. And you’re changing the subject.” She bumped her out the way so she could peer through El’s previous hiding spot.

“Mike? Mike Wheeler?” Janet let out a hum, and Max raised her eyebrows at El, who stood where she was biting her thumb nail. “Nope, haven’t done him. At least I don’t think so.”

“Jesus” Max whispered under her breath, her face contorted as she tried not laugh. El threw her hands up in the air in defeat.

“Oh, yeah, he does look hot in that jacket. And he has a cute butt.” Janet finished, making the other two giggle happily and El roll her eyes. They were gonna get stuck in the back of her head if she was made to listen to their giggling any longer.

Max turned to her. “Well, El.” she half whispered, half snickered, “does he?”

El had half the mind to telepathically launch *It* her way, and possibly a dictionary at Janet’s head. Hopefully it would hit one of the three. “Spit your gum out!” El punched her in the shoulder with each word.

“I’ll take that as a yes.” laughed Max a little louder.

“So he walked you to class?” Shannon came back to the original conversation, and El perked up, a sick and unfamiliar feeling in her stomach.

A dazed smile appeared on Becky’s face. “Yeah, we actually have physics together.”

Both Max and El popped up to look through the shelf at this. “Mike’s in Honors Chemistry this year.” El whispered.

Max nodded. “Yeah, I’m lost too.”

“What do you think he’s doing in a regular physics class?”

“Don’t look at me I’m not dating him.” Max replied, giving her the *look* .

“He’s *so* smart,” Becky went on, oblivious to the two behind the nearest bookshelf. “He understands all that physics crap and everything. And he has the cutest freckles!”

El could feel herself boiling red with anger and she had to rein herself in before books started flying off their shelves. The last thing she wanted was another girl going after Mike, especially this girl. El trusted Mike when he said he loved her last spring, believing that nothing could come between them with those three little words and the promise ring on her finger. But something kept her chewing at her fingernails. Becky was gorgeous; even if El thought the makeup was too much before, her face suddenly seemed naked and plain. Where El was a walking stick, she could see Becky had curves, and definitely in the right places. To hear a girl send herself into a giggling stupor over the little things that she loved about Mike, well then she was just stupid for thinking she was the only one who had noticed.

“Okay, I’m getting dumber just listening to them.” Max stretched her arms and added a yawn for dramatic effect. El’s skin was crawling. Girls like Becky never got to Max, ever. She simply popped her gum again and went back to spying.

“Lucky you,” Shannon tried to smile, but the sarcasm leaking out of her voice gave her away. “Since you’re failing that class, Becky.”

“Maybe he’d have time to personally tutor me,” Becky flicked her pretty red curls behind over her shoulder.

Janet giggled. “Where Becky, in the back of your car?”

*That* was it. El was about to let some books fly, marching out of the shelves that hid her when Max grabbed her arm, yanking her back to their hiding spot.

“Whoa, whoa, whoa, down girl.” Max held her back, popping her

gum again. "I get that the slut musketeers are drooling over your boy but that doesn't mean we go all Carrie on them."

El could only grunt in frustration. "Well, *what* does it mean?"

"Go tell those airheads who you are. If they want the king so badly, go show them who's queen." Max spun her around and gave her a push, revealing El to the three girls, still lost in a sea of giggles over her boyfriend.

Max hadn't given any thought to pushing El out of the aisle, sending her spiraling into the book cart. With a stumble and curse (Hopper's adopted daughter, indeed) El and the book cart crashed into the carpeted floor right in front of Becky-Shannon-Janet's table.

"Whoops." whispered Max, biting her knuckle. Crouching on the fallen cart, El threw an angry look her way that either read "*I hate you.*" or "*I'm going to kill you.*"

El attempted to pick herself up, only for the book cart to slip under her weight and come crashing down again, embarrassment running through her veins. She could hear laughter coming from the table of girls and a bruise blossoming on her hip. This day had just been *fantastic*.

It was Janet who surprised everyone by piping up with a "You alright, there?" It sounded sincere, again to everyone's surprise.

"I'm fine," grumbled El. "Thank you." The girls continued to stare at her with blank faces, El's one burning red. The wish to make herself invisible hit her hard enough to dizzy her. Max swung around the corner with a frantic "Are you okay?"

"Yeah," El replied by slamming one of the fallen books into her friend's chest. "Thanks a *lot*, Max."

"Please don't kill me." Max whispered, popping her gum *again*. El sent her a "are you serious" glare and went back for her cart. Unfortunately, they had not lost the attention of the other girls.

"Hey, aren't you-" El froze as Janet snapped her fingers and flicked her hair back "the captain of the soccer team?" Becky and Shannon

gave Janet a stare that matched El's. Oh, she was talking to Max. "What, my twin sister's on the varsity team."

"No one cares, Janet." Becky scoffed.

"Fine *then* , Becky."

Finally seeing a way out of the situation, El began to push the cart back into the aisle, but Max caught her by the arm and spun her back into the open.

"Wait, *you're* Cathy's twin?" Max popped her gum, arms crossed. El slumped until Max bopped her hip, a tell between them that meant "stand up straighter." "Never pegged her twin as being a total bi-atch." She whispered into El's ear, making El sigh. Afterall Janet was nice enough to ask if she was okay after she had fallen, and right now, back of the car comment and all, she was El's favorite of the three.

To the other girls, this meant the conversation was over. Becky turned to Shannon again, whispering something into her ear. Shannon snorted. Her reply was quiet, but El caught Mike's name again. *That's it*.

"So, who we talking about?" Max followed El as they walked up to the table.

"Why do you care?" Becky asked at the same time Janet half shouted "Mike Wheeler." Janet then let out of piggish squeal, cursing and then demanding to know why Becky had kicked her shin.

"Because he's my boyfriend." El deadpanned. She didn't know how to make it any clearer and was tired of these other girls making her feel small.

Becky raised a perfect eyebrow in response, not trying to cover her laughter. "Really? Honey, I don't think we're talking about the same boy."

"Well, *honey*- "

"Oh so there are two Mike Wheeler running around this school now?"

Max interrupted, popping herself on the table next to Janet. El stood her ground, hands on her hips, as Max shook her head to turn down whatever objects she was planning on throwing or any limbs that might snap. "Or maybe you just thought you saw two in your mirror since you can't ever look away."

Wide eyed, Becky scoffed. "Are you calling me shallow?" she demanded.

"Am I saying that I could step in a puddle of you and not get my feet wet, then yeah." snickered Max. El bit her lip, trying not to snort. Becky stomped her heel into the carpet, or at least she thought she did because Shannon jumped up with a scream.

"Becky!" she shouted, her face so red with rage her lipstick seemed to disappear. There was another loud *Stomp!* accompanied by a scream from Becky.

"Shannon!"

"Hey, quiet down you guys, we're in a library." Max sent El a look, and El decided in the back of her mind to forgive her friend for pushing her into the cart and starting this whole disaster. It was hard for the both of them not to laugh as Becky and Shannon began to grab their stuff, shoving each book in their bags with another huff or glare, as Janet watched with wide brown eyes, pulling her feet back from under the table.

"We're leaving, Janet." Becky growled. "And you, smart ass, I would try to stay out of my way from now on, mm'kay? Tell Clutzy over here she needs to keep a better eye on her boyfriend before you know," her grin was almost wicked, "he slips away."

"Wow, I feel so threatened." Max replied with dull eyes and a monotone. Shannon and Janet fell in line with their leader as she marched them out of the library. El started to walk after them, but Max caught her by the arm with a sigh. "They aren't worth it, El. See ya later, bitches! This whole thing about Mike, though, I'm sure it's not that big of a deal, right?"

El pressed her palms into her eyes. "I don't think so. This isn't the

first time other girls have flirted with Mike.”

“Wait, that’s a thing that’s actually happened?” Max’s face lit up with glee, her loud laughter drawing the attention of everyone else in the library.

“Shut! Up! Max!” El punched her in the shoulder again. “Yes it’s something that’s happened.” It had, on several occasions, but it had never bothered El that much. It did at first, when they were fourteen and hadn’t started dating yet and Mike had gotten really tall, enough for a few other girls in his science and math classes to notice. It was insecurity then, bleeding out of her because she had a ginormous crush and a terrible fear that Mike secretly didn’t reciprocate. Now, she just brushed it off and looked at the promise ring on her finger.

But in the back of her mind, something worried her. Mike had been missing their meetings for the past three days. He was being incredibly cryptic and quiet in English and at lunch. He hadn’t returned her call, and now he was walking another girl to help her in a class he wasn’t even in? And *where* had the leather jacket come from?

El let out the breath she’d been holding. It was pointless to worry. She just had to wait until she could talk to him in English, and that way they could straighten things out. Maybe she’d finally get to see him in the damn jacket.

Behind her, Max popped her gum. “Hey El, this piece is flavorless now, do you know where there’s a trash can so I can spit it out?”

-

“So, we have Becky Marshall, she’s only a junior but she thinks she runs the damn place.”

El shut her locker door with a sigh, revealing Max holding a scrap of paper in her hand, chewing another piece of gum. She squinted at it, then continued reading. “Then there’s Shannon Johnson, Becky’s right hand. Technically *her* dad is richer than Becky’s but rumor is Shannon’s still a virgin so Becky has this unspoken right to walk all

over her.”

“Why are you telling me this?” El leaned back against the locker.

“I did some recon on those bi-atches in the library. See if something is up.” Max told her, like it was nothing.

Throwing her head back into her closed locker, El then glared at Max. “I don’t want anything to do with those girls.”

“What, you seriously don’t want to know what’s going on between Mike and Becky?” Max cocked an eyebrow.

*All I really want is to see my boyfriend in that jacket. And then I want to go home and take a nap. Screw Becky.* El had heard more people whispering about in the hallways and she began to feel irritated that *literally the whole world* except her had seen Mike in a leather jacket.

“If music were the fruit of love then play on, my ladies.” El and Max turned around to see Dustin, dramatically bowing as he walked through the school hallway, Will and Lucas in tow behind him. He was wearing a wide goofy grin that cheered El up just a little.

“God *damit* would you stop quoting Shakespeare?” growled Max. “Old bastard thinks he’s something special cause he made up words and wrote the dumbest love story of all time. Fucking *annoying*. ”

“Wait,” Lucas held up hand, “are we talking about Shakespeare or Dustin?” Lucas laughed, bumping his friend in the shoulder. Dustin scowled.

“Which dumbest love story of all time? Cleopatra and Mark Antony, Ophelia and Hamlet, Desdemona and Othello, Macbeth and his serial killer wife, or-” Dustin had that light in his eyes, lost in the idea of annoying both Max and Lucas.

“Oh shut up, now you’re just showing off.” Max rolled her eyes. “It’s bad enough I have to be in your play, Dustin, but you keep talking like that in public. At least you admit that they’re *all* dumb.”

“Ok, first of all, you are having a *blast* being in Hamlet, and second, you lost the bet, so it’s your own fault.” Dustin gave her a knowing



look, but Max's glare only intensified. Last month, Dustin bet *both* Lucas and Max that if he could get Rachel Thompson (a hot blonde senior who was the star of every Hawkins High performance as well as a ballerina, vocalist, and gymnast with a love for fantasy novels; Dustin was practically in love with her the moment they met, earning him "Well this doesn't look familiar *at all*," from Lucas and a "Stop copying me" from Mike) to go to homecoming with him, than Max and Lucas would have to audition for Hamlet, and pay Dustin fifty bucks each. If he couldn't, then he had clean both the baseball and girl's soccer team's equipment for the next month. And when homecoming had rolled around, El half remembered because she'd been very focused on someone else, Dustin rolled into the gymnasium with Rachel on his arm. Lucas and Max were forced to audition for the school's production of *Hamlet*. Half assing their auditions in hopes of getting out of the whole thing, Dustin, the lead, had instead given them major roles with Max as Polonius ("Wait, I'm the character you get to *stab* ?") and Lucas as Horatio. They had three rehearsals so far, and Max called after everyone to complain, but El had a growing suspicion that Max was having more fun in the production than she let on.

Getting back to her piece of paper, Max continued with their conversation from before. "Janet King, also a junior, apparently has a really nice car, or something."

"Janet? What about Janet?" Lucas asked, his eyebrows furrowed.

"That she's a gigantic slut."

"Oh, yeah." Lucas nodded, "that Janet."

"Stop that," El finally spoke up, running a hand through her hair. "Janet was nice. She asked if I was okay while Becky and Shannon just laughed at me."

"Why were they laughing at you?" Will perked up from behind Dustin and Lucas, suddenly interested in the conversation now that they were talking about someone making fun of his sister.

"Because," El pursed her lips and sent a glare at Max, who had found something *super* interesting on the ceiling. "Max pushed me into a

library cart right in front of Becky, Shannon, and Janet.”

“And she didn’t die?”Dustin grimaced.

Max brushed this off, and went back to her recon, “Anyways, Janet’s slept with at least half the baseball team,” they all turned to look at Lucas but he just shook his head. “And most of the football team, but she’s not known for stealing boyfriends, so I wouldn’t worry about her.”

“I wasn’t worrying about her, I-” El tried to speak up but the boys interrupted her.

“What are guys talking about?:

“Yeah, why should El be worried?”

Max glanced at El, and El began to softly hit her head against her locker repeatedly “Well Mister I’m Just Going To Show Up In A Leather Jacket Like I’m Suddenly Cool or something-”

“Nice name.” coughed Lucas.

“Leather jacket?” Dustin gave El a confused looked and she mouthed “Mike.”

“Has caught the attention of half the junior girls, apparently, including queen bee Becky Marshall and her sad little ladybug Shannon Johnson. Oh, and Janet, who thinks he has a cute butt, by the way.”

“Hold on,” Dustin interrupted, wide eyes staring into El’s “isn’t Becky Marshall the girl who walked in on you and Mike making out in the chemistry lab?”

El felt her whole face redden as all of her friends turned to look at her with wide eyes. “No!”

“Well how would you know, El” Lucas’ lips lifted into a cocky smile, “you were probably to busy with Mike to notice-” *CLONK!*

“Ow!”

“What the hell, El?”

Wiping the blood away from her nose, El started over as Dustin and Lucas held their spinning heads. “Becky was just in library today with Janet and Shannon. That’s how we found out that Mike’s wearing a leather jacket.” El filled in.

“Queen Bee says Mike ‘walked her to class’ today.” finished Max.

“Mike was walking another girl to class?” Lucas asked. “Are we talking about Mike Wheeler? You know, the one who waited a whole year while El was in another dimension to take her to some dance? The same Mike who gave El a promise ring this year because he’s a *giant sap*?”

Max nodded. “The very same.”

“You don’t think Mike is cheating on you, El?” Dustin asked.

El didn’t know. There was a tiny part of her that was scared, because Becky was everything she wasn’t. Maybe Mike had finally woken up and realized he could do better than her, that he deserved more than someone who was broken from the start. The insecure part of her whispered she wasn’t worthy of Mike, and once he realized this, he’d leave her and that it was only a matter of time. But why did have to be with Becky?

El mumbled something incoherent, then stood up straight. She wasn’t going to let herself become a prisoner to worry. She loved Mike, too much to hold him and wanted the best for him, and if she wasn’t it, then she’d let go. But then there was the part of her that felt like the universe had done nothing for the two of them except screw them over, and felt that she should put up fight, simply because she loved him.

“Are you serious, Dustin? There’s *no way* Mike’s cheating on El. Did you not just here me list all the shit he’s done for her, or suddenly forgotten that every time she’s not around, he *never* shuts up about her? There’s your Romeo and Juliet for you.”

“Stupid fucking story,” Max whispered.

“And it ended badly.” Dustin reminded them.

“Look, all I’m saying is Mike’s been in love with El, since like, we found her in the rain. It makes *no* sense Mike would cheat on her. Besides, he doesn’t have a death wish.”

“Okay, that’s true.” conceded Dustin. “Mike isn’t that stupid. And way to in love with you, El. It’s almost annoying.” He then clapped his hands together, making everyone jump. “Aha! It was Christy Manchester who found you two making out in the chemistry lab! Becky found you two sucking face in the biology lab.”

Will shot El a look. “It happened twice? Did you at least wear safety goggles?” He laughed, shaking his head at her.

El was too embarrassed to even answer. And the last thing she wanted her friends to know was that *no*, it hadn’t happened twice, they’d only been *caught* twice.

“None of this explains why he, quote unquote, walked Becky to class. Or why he suddenly has science with her.” Max told them.

“Didn’t know Becky Marshall was all a sudden smart enough to be in honors chemistry.” Dustin chuckled.

“Yes Dustin,” Max deadpanned, “ and Will’s been making out with the head cheerleader.”

From behind Dustin and Lucas, Will popped up, replying with a disgusted “No thank you!”

Max and El went on to explain that for whatever reason, Mike was hanging out with Becky in the *junior’s* physics class, and how Becky wanted him to be her personal tutor and not just in physics.

“So if Mike’s not cheating, then what is he doing?” asked Dustin.

“I’m gonna go with something stupid, probably.” Max flipped her hair ignoring when El punched in her in the shoulder.

“You wanna put money on that?” Dustin eye’s lit up and Lucas leaned in a little closer.

“Yeah. I’ll put money on that. Fifty bucks. How does that sound Henderson, that Wheeler is doing something stupid but not cheating on El.”

Dustin took a step back, “Well I’m not putting money that he is cheating on El. I’m not an idiot- don’t you say anything Lucas- and I can’t afford to lose fifty bucks. I’m taking Rachel out again this weekend.”

“Well *what* do you think is going on, oh wise Shakespeare nerd?” Lucas asked, waving his hand around for dramatic effect.

“I dunno. Mike’s always in some science class or another. You’d think he was in love with science not El.” he shrugged.

“So you’re saying that Mike is cheating on El, but with science?” Lucas raised an eyebrow. “Do you know how stupid you sound right now?”

“Hey, I atleast I think it’s possible. Maybe he thinks science is sexy or something. Don’t judge, Sinclair, that’s rude.”

“So now you’re saying Mike was seduced by science? Do you *hear* yourself?”

“Yes Lucas,” Dustin cocked his head as if this whole thing was obvious. “I’m putting fifty bucks on this has more to do with science than with anything else.”

Lucas let out a long sigh. “Okay, Henderson puts fifty on Wheeler being seduced by science. I’ll put fifty on Wheeler is doing something stupid. Byers, you in?”

Will had been oddly silent for most of the conversation and had been leaning on the wall with his hands in his pockets and his eyes on the floor, only chiming in now to answer Lucas, “No, and you guys have a gambling problem.” El narrowed her eyes, and he took a step backward.

“Where are you going, Will?” She asked as he took another step.

“Nowhere, El.” He muttered, still looking at his shoes. He began to

inch away from their group, looking up and down for a path between all the mass of students in the hallway

El pushed Dustin and Lucas out of the way but not before Will grabbed his jacket and broke out into a full on sprint. "Will!" she yelled at her brother. "What do you know?"

"Leave me out of this, El!" he turned to shout back at her, his voice over everyone else's, then disappearing down the hall where she knew the art room was. Sighing, she walked back to Max and the others.

*What's his problem? And what does he know that the rest of us don't?*

"What was that about?" Max asked once Eleven got back. Lucas was back on Dustin's case about Mike's true love secretly being science by calling him a dumbass. Dustin then swore Lucas would be paying him 50 bucks this weekend.

"I don't know." El answered Max, "but I'm going to figure this thing out before you all drive me crazy!" *And I'm going to see this jacket whether or not it kills me.*

## 2. baby don't you ask me cause i can only feed you likes (87 on the 405)

### Summary for the Chapter:

When El can't get the information she wants out of her brother, she takes matters into her own hands.

### Notes for the Chapter:

Thank you so much for your feedback!!! It's been fun writing for you guys! Thank you for being patient I'm not a great author when it comes to updating but you guys motivate me to write!

El couldn't concentrate.

She hadn't been able to concentrate since she sat flopped onto her bed after Will drove them home.

It had been a frustrating twenty minute ride where El found thirty different ways to ask her brother the same question, "What do you know?" while Will found thirty different ways to change to the subject.

"Please, Will!" El tried again. "Do you know what's going on with Mike? Please, please, please, *please* tell me!"

"Hey Eleven, did you know that about 8000 people are killed every year by musical instruments?" He didn't even look at her as he told her his fourth random fact of the afternoon, eyes slightly wide and glued to the road. He turned the car onto Mirkwood as she punched him in the shoulder.

"Really? Do you want to be on that list?" El asked through gritted teeth.

"Is that a threat, El? You're saying you're going to kill me with a musical instrument?" Will laughed despite the situation, but he still wouldn't look at her.

“You’re changing the subject *again* !”

“I mean why kill me with a musical instrument when you could just use your brain-”

“Will!” El practically shouted, successfully making him jump. “Just please. No secrets, remember? Friends-”

“Yeah, yeah, friends don’t lie. But I’m not lying!” He took his hands off the wheel in his insistence and the car swerved. “Shit! I swear to God I’m *not* lying.”

“You aren’t? You swear? On your grave?” El rarely made promises with anyone other than Mike, because that was something special between them and only them. Promises were borderline sacred, an unspoken agreement between Mike and her to always tell each other the truth, and they were *never* broken. But back in the fall of 1984, Dustin had taught her swearing, both on her word and multiple different curse words, as well as pinky swears and spit swears (which no one but Dustin ever did). So instead of making promises with other people, she just made them swear on their word when she wanted the truth from them. With Will, there was this running joke that he had to swear on his grave because he *actually* had one.

“Yes, El!” Will hit his fist on the steering wheel, cursing loudly. “I swear, *on my grave*, but I can’t believe *that’s* still a thing, that I am one hundred percent not lying.”

“So you don’t know anything?”

Will grimaced. “I didn’t say that.”

“I can’t believe you!” El shouted. “You swore you weren’t lying!”

“I’m not lying to you, El!”

“Then what the *hell*, Will?” El rarely yelled at people, and while she swore a lot (no thanks to Dustin and Hopper) she never directed her cursing at others. .

“I’m not lying,” he said for the millionth time. “I’m just not... telling you the whole truth.”



El threw her head back into the seat as Will brought the car up to the house. Already he was halfway out the car as she yelled at him. "That's *lying*, Will Byers!"

"No, it isn't! I swear *nothing* is going on, El! Just leave me out of this!" He shouted back at her. El unbuckled her seatbelt and bolted out of the car to try and keep up with him, but he was running from her again. She chased Will through the living room and was about to follow him into his room when she was met by the wooden door and his "No Trespassing" sign. She tried the door only to find it was locked. "The things I do for you two!" Will yelled from his bedroom as El debated unlocking the door anyways.

"What are you two yelling about?" Joyce shouted from the kitchen and El decided, no, she wasn't going to telekinetically rip out Will's door handle, not again, and she slumped away to her room.

"Nothing, *apparently* !" El shouted back, and she heard Will groan.

She slipped into her own room, thinking back to when she shared a room with Will, back when they were fourteen and there was never any secrets. They used to build forts and have breakfast at midnight, staying up past two to catch each other up on comic books and ward off nightmares. Then Jonathan had gone off to NYU, giving El his room as a parting gift. Will and Mike had helped her paint and decorate, Nancy and Holly too, she remembered as she took in the room around her, the soft pink room covered with pictures of her and Mike, her and Max with the rest of the boys, pictures Jonathan had taken, drawings Will had given her, notes Mike had left her, like the one she picked up from her vanity as she flung her back pack on the floor.

"*By the way,*" he had written, "*you have the cutest nose. And I win.*"

She smiled, despite herself. Back when they were sixteen, they got into a very heated compliment war. trying to distract each other over their game of Spoons. But the competition continued long after the game was over because El, who had lost, was stubborn beyond herself and Mike was incredibly competitive and wanted to keep his title as king of Spoons. So the competition became who could come up with the most compliments each week, in the form of classroom

notes telekinetically thrown at his head, scraps of paper he'd slipped into books, folded napkins and scribbled on returned assignments left in each other's rooms and lockers.

El flopped back onto her comforter and lay there for several minutes staring up at her pink ceiling, half listening to rock music Will had turned up loudly in his room.

*"Friend? What is friend?"*

*"It's someone you'd do anything for."*

"What are you hiding, doofus?" She asked the note, biting her lip.

She tossed the note back onto the pile and picked her backpack up, giving up on trying to figure out what Mike was really up too. She was inclined to believe Max, that yes, it was something stupid, or yeah, maybe he had gotten caught up with his studies, because the idea of Mike cheating on her hurt too much. Considering whether she should just outright ask Will if that was what Mike was doing, El sat up and was about to start pounding on the wall between hers and his room when Joyce peeked her head in El's doorway.

"I'm going to the grocery store, I was wondering if you two needed anything?" asked Joyce, brandishing a shopping list from her purse.

"Yeah," El yelled at the wall, "I need Will to tell me what's going on!"

A confused look came over Joyce's face. "What- what's going on with what, exactly?"

"Not happening, El!" the wall shouted back and suddenly The Smiths was playing louder.

"Oh, Will, you're going to go deaf." Joyce shook her head in the direction of Will's room, then she turned back to El. "So what's going on with what? Why do you keep yelling at each other? Are you two fighting?"

"No!" Will yelled at the same time El shook her head yes.

"Wait, what about?" Joyce looked between the two doors.

“Mike.” El filled in before her brother screamed “Nothing” over the music.

“Okay, well while you two figure this out I’m going to go do the shopping.” Joyce told her son, shoving the grocery list back in her purse. “And then I was thinking about meeting Hopper at the station for some dinner, do you think you can fend for yourselves?”

“We’ll be fine Mom!” Will yelled.

“Okay,” she cast one last glance at Eleven. “See you kids later.”

The screen door slammed shut as Joyce left, and El opened her back pack, pulling out notebook paper and her copy of Hamlet.

*“Is the plain ignorance justifies Ophelia’s distrust to Hamlet?”* the prompt read. El stared at it for ten minutes straight.

No matter how hard she tried, she couldn’t get her mind to concentrate on her essay. She kept thinking about Becky, Shannon, and Janet, back there talking about Mike as if he was a prize to be won, talking to her like she wasn’t even worthy to compete against them. Then there was Dustin, Max, and Lucas, their faith that Mike was faithful heavy, willing to put a hefty price on the real reason he’d disappeared. And Will, who knew something, but just kept shutting her out. Her heart was aching that her brother wanted nothing to do with her, and that the boy who pulled her from the rain was going to chose somebody else.

Dazed, she drew flowers on the border of her notebook paper, trying for the sixth time to come up with something to write about. But she only ever came to the thought of “What if he loves someone else?”

*That’s a stupid thought* , El chastised herself, *Mike doesn’t love someone else. He said he loved me. He promised.*

*But... someone else might love him. He’s going to realize he deserves better than me and chose them.*

She just wanted Mike to be happy. And for so many years, he told her that she did make him happy, and she told him, when he was being brave and letting his insecurities be vulnerable, she would assure him

that he made her happy too.

But right now she couldn't help thinking that she hadn't deserved it, and that she hadn't deserved him.

Will had turned his music down, and she could hear him on the phone in the hallway. With a sigh, El crumpled up her seventh start on the essay and threw it into the trash, wiping her bloody nose with the back of her hand. She flipped through her battered copy of the Shakespeare play. In all honesty, El had no idea what to even write about, and the one person who could help her had disappeared from her world.

*Tap! Tap! Tap!* El shot up from her bed at the sound coming from the window. She bolted to it, unlocking it in a swift movement. "Mike?" she asked, her voice bleeding with hope, as she pulled the window open.

"Sorry to disappoint, El." she heard the other person say, and couldn't help rolling her eyes.

"Hi Andrew."

"Wow? Cold shoulder? Ouch, El, I'm hurt." Andrew Davis was looking at her from the other side of her window. Although he was the smallest football player on the Hawkins High Football team, he still had trouble pulling himself and his letterman jacket through El's window. He rolled onto the carpet floor with an ungraceful *oomph* and flipped his blonde hair out of the way, revealing bright blue eyes. With his physique and good looks, Andrew might as well have been a teenage heart throb, breaking girl's hearts one after the the other. Except for one specific thing.

"Is Will home?"

"Yeah, he's home." El sighed. She liked Andrew well enough, but she was still upset it wasn't who she thought it was. "He's being a total *butthead*," she shouted at the wall and a look of confusion crossed over Andrew's face, "but he's home."

Andrew nodded, and stood up, brushing off his pants. "Okay then.

Thanks, El.”

He started for the door, but El thought of something and stopped him. “Hey, Andrew?”

“Mmm, yeah?”

“Why do you always come through my window instead of Will’s?” she asked, crossing her arms.

Andrew only shrugged. “Your window is easier to open. Will’s gets stuck a lot.”

“Is that the only reason?” El narrowed her eyes and put her hands on her hips. “You two are already dating behind Joyce and Hopper’s back, and I know Will told you they weren’t home over the phone, so why don’t you just walk through the front door?.”

“I dunno, El.” he shrugged again. “It’s supposed to be romantic.”

“Try again then, cause you’ve got the wrong window.” El smirked.

Andrew let out a long sigh, shaking his head. “Fine. It’s just a back up plan. If people, like your parents, see me coming into Will’s room, it raises questions, right? If they catch me in your room, they think I was with you.”

“But everyone knows I’m dating Mike.” She thought they’d made that very clear. “If they see you in my room then they’re going to have no idea why you’re here. They’re going to think you’re robbing us or something.” *And then Hopper would probably shoot you*, she thought, but didn’t say.

“Fine, then we say I’m your man on the side.” he clapped her on the back, and hard.

“No!” El practically shouted. Just because Mike *might* be cheating her didn’t mean she’d ever do the same to him. The prospect hanging over her head that he might actually be cheating on her with Becky Marshall was torment enough for one person.

“I’m kidding!” Andrew’s laughter boomed off the walls of her room.

"I'd never be into that."

"Thank you Andrew, that's very flattering." El rolled her eyes.

"Is Andrew here?" she heard Will yell from the living room.

"Through my window, and everything!" El shouted back. "The things I do for you two!"

"Okay, well, I guess that's my signal. Thanks for everything, El." saluting her, Andrew walked backwards through her doorway. "We thank you for your honorable service."

El rolled her eyes again, but she was holding back laughter. That's when she had an idea. "Hey, Andrew?"

The football player swung back into view. "Yep?"

"Can you do me a favor?"

-

Mike hadn't been in English that day. After talking with her friends and listening to their "convincing" theories on what her missing boyfriend was up too, El was prepared to interrogate him. But first she thought she should just ignore him first, since he was ignoring her. A taste of his own medicine might be good for him.

El pulled out her materials for class that day, as the bell had just rung and students were only just starting to roll into the classroom. She started the warm up that was asked of them on the blackboard, groaning when she saw there was an essay due in the upcoming week. And then she waited.

The final bell rung, and he still hadn't come in. El listened to the classmates around finishing the warm up and starting to talk to each other about their days. Somewhere in the mix, El heard Mike and the infamous leather jacket mentioned and with a sigh, she looked at his empty desk. *Where is he?*

That's when the girl behind her tapped her on the shoulder, giggling. "Hey, Ella?"

“Yes, Jessica?” she gave the girl a tired response, not bothering to correct the wrong name.

“Have you seen Mike today? Super hot. You were so lucky, you know. Can you get me a guy like that?”

“Like what?” El asked, eyebrows furrowed. At least her classmate understood that Mike was off limits, where it was open season to the junior girls.

“Like a bad boy Ella,” Jessica said, as if it was obvious, “I mean I hear he was mouthing off to Mrs. Frank at lunch today. Oh, and that he pushed Coach Rivers for getting in his face.”

Jessica had the biggest smile on her face, and El was tempted to tell the other girl to back off. But all she said was “That doesn’t sound like Mike *at all* .” Yelling and pushing teachers? What had happened to boy that stayed late after class to Mrs. Frank to help her grade papers? El swallowed tears and turned back to Jessica.

“I haven’t actually seen him at all today. Do you know where he is?”  
*Or he might be up to?*

“Oh...” Jessica bit her lip. “I see.”

“What?” El glanced at Mike’s empty seat.

“I didn’t know, well we all actually assumed that, you know what nevermind.” Jessica tried to quickly turn her seat back around but El stopped the chair from moving.

“What is it, Jessica?” asked El again.

The other girl looked at her fingernails. “We thought you and Mike had broken up.” *What?* “Because Wheeler’s never acted this way before.”

“I *didn’t* dump Mike.” El said, enunciating every word.

“Oh we didn’t think you did. Didn’t Mike dump you?”

Later, El would be glad she didn’t make anything levitate and collide

with Jessica. But in the moment, it was all she wanted. “Mike didn’t dump me!”

Jessica shrugged and before El could say anything else, the teacher stood up from his desk and began class. “No Michael today, Ms. El?”

El just put her head in her hands and stayed that way for the rest of the period. She felt like she was fourteen years old again. So close to Mike as his friend but never close enough. Thinking she was just a lovesick puppy and he would hate her for ruining their friendship. El would always be afraid of disappointing someone for the rest of her life, but the last person she wanted to be disappointed in her was Mike, so she stood still and didn’t rock the boat. But when she did mess things up, she found out that Mike really did feel the way she did, but he was just as scared. With half the world believing he was cheating on her, and the other believing he had just dumped her, at least either way he was finally free of her, and could be his true bad boy self.

Mike didn’t want her anymore.

She’d battled with herself all through English in silence, and was the first one out of class when the bell rang. El checked all their usual hiding places, even the library. Then thinking about what Dustin had said earlier, El checked all the science labs. He was nowhere to be found, and she was running out of places when Will found her and said they should just go home.

“You can call him when you get home.” Will brought an arm around his sister slumping shoulders. “It’s nothing.”

Will shouldn’t have reminded her that he knew something and he had hell to pay when they got in the car and El remembered that he ran off earlier. That began the annoying barrage of questions he barely managed to dodge, and by the time they got home, El had completely forgotten about calling her stupid boyfriend because she was trying to get information from her stupid brother. Then Andrew had crawled through her window, giving El an idea.

Andrew was in the kitchen with Will now. El had tiptoed out of her room a few minutes after to find a place to hide in the living room.



On her way there she saw the phone hanging in the kitchen, and was seriously tempted to call and get this whole thing over with. But she figured that Mike wouldn't answer or he wouldn't be home, since he was making himself extra sparse lately, so El continued tiptoeing to the living room. She slid down between the couch and the wall, making sure she could still hear their conversation, but she couldn't be seen.

"So what are you going to do when football season is over, Andrew?" Will was asking.

"Basketball probably." they both laughed while El's eyebrow shot up in confusion. "Nah, we both know I'm too short for basketball, I wish I was as tall as you."

"Hey it has it's disadvantages! I can't fit in some cars! Plus I can't play a sport to save my life, so which one of us is luckier?" Will protested.

*Come on, Andrew,* El thought to herself. *Just ask him!* She wondered if she could peek around and find objects she could roll in Andrew's direction as a reminder of what he was suppose to be doing. But Andrew didn't know about the things she could do (telling him was risky since he and Will had only been going out for a few months) so it would most likely just tip Will off.

"Says Mr. I Can Draw You in Five Seconds." Andrew snorted. "Actually I was thinking about going out for baseball next season. Do you think you're buddy Sinclair would let me on the team?"

"I can ask him and put in a good word for you." Will answered. El listened to the silence that followed.

Andrew coughed, and the moment was broken. *Come on, Andrew!*

"So, um, Will, I heard something funny today." *Yes, thank you!*

"Really? What was it?" El bit her lip. She could hear the suspicion leaking out of her brother's voice and wanted to hit her head on something. This was a stupid idea. Will didn't like Andrew because he could act, because he very obviously couldn't.

"It was about your friend, um I forgot his name." *Seriously?* "Tall? Curly hair- does he have curly hair?" Andrew asked Will.

"I don't know Andrew because I still don't know who you're talking about." Will replied in a monotone voice.

"Ah, man. I swear I remember this. Makes me feel bad I don't talk to your friends more." Andrew admitted.

"That's okay." Will sounded sincere again. "It doesn't bother me that much. I don't really know how they'd react to us."

Andrew let out a long sigh. "I don't think it'd be too bad. You said they'd gone through some weird things and are pretty understanding. Besides, your sister doesn't care. She lets me come in through her window and everything."

"Yeah, but El's weird." *Oh, thanks a lot Will.* "The things you think are going to bother other people don't usually bother her."

"The guy who's dating your sister!" Andrew shouted all of a sudden.

"Yeah, Mike... What about him?"

Andrew was on a roll now. El was pretty sure if he could see her he'd be winking, and the whole thing would be off. "Is his hair curly? I can't really remember."

"I guess..."

"Okay, no, now I remember! Not about the curly hair but what I heard today."

"That you thought was funny?" Will finished for him. El bit down on her fingernail.

"Yeah. People were saying he was walking around in a leather jacket? Is that something he usually does?" asked Andrew.

"I dunno," Will shrugged. "I guess he's been doing it recently."

"Hmm, any reason why?" Andrew prompted.

El heard Will put his pencil down. "He's just been doing some stuff." *Well, that's vague. That could be anything.*

"Well why does he need a leather jacket?" Andrew tried again.

"I guess he just wants to wear one. Why are we talking about Mike again? Am I not good enough anymore?" Will gave him a nervous laugh.

"Now you know how I feel." El whispered under her breath.

"No, you're perfect." Andrew corrected him, and El's heart melted a little. "But I heard this Mike guy is doing some kinda awful stuff to your sister."

"Like what?"

"Well..." Andrew tampered off, "first I heard that he was cheating on her. With that junior girl, you know, the one who's always at our practices, staring at the other guys like they're meat. She freaks me out."

"Now who are we talking about?" Will asked. The suspicion was back in his voice.

"Beth? No Becky. Yeah Becky Marshall. And then I heard Wheeler flat out dumped your sister so he could go out with her." finished Andrew. *Please let this work!* El crossed her fingers.

"Those are just rumors." Will told Andrew.

"I was thinking maybe the jacket had something to do with it, ya know? Like did Becky give him the jacket, like where does the jacket come into play here?"

Will sounded exasperated as he spoke, "He's just wearing the jacket because- wait, a second! El put you up to this didn't she! This why you were in her room so long!"

"No! No she didn't- Okay, yeah she did. Don't look at me like Will, I was just trying to help her! She seems really upset, Will."

“So she set me up?” yelled Will. El buried herself deeper into her hiding spot. “Where is she? Is she still in her room?”

“Um, not really, Will, I swear she didn’t set me up!”

“Really?” Will asked his boyfriend incredulously. “Are you sure about that? Because five minutes ago you didn’t even remember Mike’s name!”

Andrew sighed, and El lay still as silence fell over the room.

“Boo.” El jumped. She looked up to find Will standing above her.

“Hi, Will, so this is not what it looks like...” El trailed, slowly inching up the wall. Andrew was standing behind him, giving El an apologetic shrug.

“You mean it looks like you were spying on me and Andrew to find out what I know.” Will crossed his arms and looked down at her. El stood up to her full height, which wasn’t very impressive, and crossed her arms.

“You wouldn’t tell me *anything*,” El poked him the arm, and Will winced. “You know what Mike means to me and you just decided to shut me out! How could you?”

“El, I said I couldn’t tell you anything not that something bad is happening!” tried Will, but El just felt frustrated, and close to tears.

“But that’s what everyone else is saying, Will! Mike has gone from cheating on me with a horrible girl to just flat out dumping me in *one* day, without thinking that I might like to know what’s going on!” El turned away from them, wiping her tears away.

“Awh, El, please don’t be sad.” Andrew stepped in front of Will and enveloped her in a hug. “Mike wouldn’t do that stuff to you.”

“You don’t understand. He’s going to chose someone else.” She hiccuped.

“Wait, what?” Will asked. “He’s going to chose someone else? Are we talking about Mike?”

El rolled her eyes at him. He was just rehashing what her friends had said earlier. “El, Mike isn’t cheating on you with Becky.”

“Oh so now you tell me!” El muttered into Andrew’s shoulder. “If he’s not cheating on me then what is going on?”

Will let out a long sigh and flopped onto the couch. El flopped next to him, and Andrew took Hopper’s arm chair. “I can’t tell you what Mike’s really doing, but I can tell you it’s not something horrible.”

“It isn’t?” El hiccupped, suddenly feeling stupid for bursting into tears in front of them.

“No.” Will shook his head. “He’s not cheating and he’s not going to dump you. I promised Mike I would keep it a secret-”

“Keep what a secret?” El narrowed her eyes at him.

“I *really, really*, can’t tell you. I’m sorry, El. Look Mike made me swear on my grave,” he nudged her with his elbow and El let out a laugh despite herself. “But I think you’ll like it.”

“Can I guess?” El asked. When the concept of what a christmas present was explained to her back 1984, El and Mike invented a game. Mike had explained that she wasn’t allowed to open them (she was getting two this year, since she didn’t get hers last year) until Christmas morning, but El really, *really* wanted to know what was in them. She just couldn’t wait. So she asked if she could guess. And she guessed, and guessed, and guessed. She managed to get one (the supercomm), and ever since then, whenever they would give each other gifts, they would try to guess what the present was. El did it with everybody, but her favorite gifts were always from Mike.

“I don’t think you’ll be able to guess this.” Will smiled at her.

“So you’re not going to let me try?” laughed El.

“El, I’m pretty sure you won’t be able to guess this in a million years.”

“I bet he does look pretty hot in that jacket.” said Andrew from his arm chair.

“Andrew!” Will shouted while El just laughed.

“Now *he* has good taste! I think you should keep this one, Will!”

“I should get a leather jacket,” was all Will mumbled, rolling his eyes, but El threw her arms around her around her brother anyways.

“Thanks Will,” she whispered. “Sorry I spied on you and interrupted your date.”

“It’s fine, El. You can come hang out with us if you want.” Will offered .

El shook her head. “No, it’s okay. I know what it’s like to have a third wheel hanging around when there’s certain things you want to be doing with your boyfriend.” she sent him a pointed look. “Besides, Max is bound to call soon to “complain” about rehearsal.”

Getting off the couch, El gave Andrew a high five and thanked him for his help.

“You’re welcome, Window Buddy!” Andrew smiled.

As she walked down the hall, El felt like a weight had been lifted from her shoulders and couldn’t help smiling at whatever Mike was planning. Guess that dork was worth it after all.

El tried not to laugh when she heard Andrew ask “So you’re getting a leather jacket when again?”

-

“So shit went down at rehearsal, are you ready for this?”

“I guess.” El muttered into the receiver, hoping to she wasn’t going to regret this.

“Okay so the dude playing Old Hamlet is this total douche, right? Anyways-”

“I thought Dustin was playing Old Hamlet?” El asked.

Max snorted. "Who says I'm not talking about Dustin?"

"Max!" El chastised.

"Just kidding! Dustin's playing regular old Hamlet- I mean the young one not the old one, I'm sorry if this is confusing. No, okay, Dustin is playing the young Hamlet, the main Hamlet, the one who complains all the time, and this guy Adam is playing Old Hamlet, the ghost one."

"So you didn't go with Lucas' idea to just use a sock puppet hanging from the ceiling?" El stifled her laughter.

"God, I *wish*. This guy Adam is a piece of work. Apparently he's in love with Rachel too, is there anyone in this goddamn troupe who isn't in love with her? They were the "it" couple last year after the musical. But then after some fight Rachel basically told him to go fuck himself, I really wished I'd been there to see that, and now he's super jealous that Dustin's going out with her." Max was on a roll, and El didn't see the point of trying to interrupt her again.

"So this douche bag calls Dustin out during the middle of the scene-"

Now she did have to stop her. "What scene?" she asked, chewing on her fingernail.

"The one where Hamlet's losing his shit at Ophelia."

"Oh." El nodded. "That's what my essay's supposed to be about."

"Well it's the most boring thing in the world, so good fucking luck, babe. But Lucas and I are right off stage and Dustin and Rachel are acting and then Adam has the lights guy Joe bring up the house lights up and challenges Dustin to a fight!"

"Like a real one?"

Max huffs. "Yep, he said to meet him in the back of the school so he could have his ass handed to him."

"So what happened?" asked El.

“Rachel kicked his ass, *that’s* what happened. It was fucking amazing, El. Now I know why everyone’s in love with her.”

“You sound like you’re in love with her.”

“Nah too blonde,” Max answers like it was a normal observation. “And she has a very obvious thing for Dustin. So what about you homeslice? How was English? Does Mike look as hot as you’d hoped?”

“Mike wasn’t in English.” El explained. “So I didn’t get to see it.”

“Everyone else has. Adam was talking about getting one before rehearsal. It’s disgusting. What has your boy toy done?” Max whined.

“Did you just call Mike my boy toy?” El narrowed her eyes, wrapping her finger with the phone cord. Max just laughed. “No, he wasn’t in English. And apparently he’s dumped me for Becky Marshall.”

Max’s laughter stopped instantly. “What the *hell* ?”

“No, Max, it’s just-”

“‘I’m gonna go kick Mike Wheeler’s ass *right now*. ” Max said before she could finish explaining that no, it was just a silly rumor and they were going to work things out, but the phone line went dead and El found herself talking to an empty silence.

“Hello? Max?”

*Perfect. Just what we needed*, El thought to herself as Andrew ran into her room and jumped out her open window, yelling “See ya, El!” over the sound of Hopper and Joyce’s returning voices.

### **Notes for the Chapter:**

Please don't hate me!!!! I promise all will be revealed in the next chapter!!!!



### 3. devil's got a hold and we're laughing (i wonder if the devil's even packing)

#### Summary for the Chapter:

Mike reveals what he's been hiding...

#### Notes for the Chapter:

thank you for being patient. I've spent all this time building suspense that I hope the final reveal will be everything you wanted! thank you for reading and as always, tell me what you think!

Will was tired of keeping secrets.

Well, not every secret. Some were easier to keep than others. A lot was riding on his application to NYU, so he didn't say he was applying. Dating Andrew was not something he planned to keep a secret forever, he just needed to find the right time to tell his mom and Hopper. These of course, were good things. And since how 1984 went down, Will didn't really keep "life threatening" secrets anymore. The secret Will was keeping for Mike, well, maybe it was a good thing. It certainly was along the lines of "life threatening" but mostly, it was just kind of a disaster.

This was because he was not good at keeping secrets from Eleven. She'd look at him with her big brown eyes and Will would just give in (this made Will sympathetic to Mike, as he had no idea how he managed for more than five minutes). Will had ruined Christmas presents like that, and a surprise birthday party the gang had put together for her. This time it was just as hard *not* to tell her, but he kept his mouth shut, not because he didn't want to tell her, but because wanted to see the look on her face once Mike revealed what he was up to. And because he'd never here the end of it from Mike if he ever did spill. He had a feeling he'd never here the end of it from El or the others for keeping it a secret.

*Damned if I do, damned if I don't*, Will told himself.

When El got off the phone last night, Will decided it was time to hurry Mike's plan up, because there was no way Will was going to last the weekend against El and her strategic plan of annoying him until he confessed.

"Was that Max?" he asked as she came into the kitchen, not looking up from his drawing. "What happened at rehearsal this time?"

"Someone wanted to fight Dustin for Rachel." El told him, slumping into the chair next to him. Will put his pencil down.

"Really? Did they actually have a fight?" He knew the theatre kids were a weird bunch, just not a violent one.

"I'm not sure. Max said Rachel kicked the other guy's ass, or something." El bit her lip.

Will narrowed his eyes at his sister. She was looking off into the living room, not really there with him. "Hey, you okay?" he nudged her.

"Oh, yeah." she shook herself out of her stupor. "It's just this Mike thing again."

"You're not going to ask again are you?" He really didn't want to see her cry again.

"No, I won't." El smiled that smile she always had thinking about her boyfriend. "But Max is going over to beat him up, and I don't really know how to fix that."

"Wait, *what*?"

"I told her Mike dumped me and she just hung up on me to go 'kick his ass.'" El threw her head in her hands. "What have I done?"

"You didn't explain the whole rumor aspect of the problem?" asked Will.

El slumped further into her chair. "I tried but she hung up before she could. Did I just kill Mike?"

Will sighed. He knew what was going to kill Mike before Max did.

Will only knew what Mike had been doing by accident. He'd gone over to the Wheeler's house on Monday night to retrieve his forgotten sketchbook, left there after a long D&D campaign from the Sunday before. Mike was acting strange during the game, leaving often even though he was the Dungeon Master and chewing on his nails a lot more than usual.

Will had knocked on the front door and was met by a grumpy Mrs. Wheeler, not her usual perky self. Will quickly explained why he was there and she let him in, yelling to the entire house that Will had stopped by. Shrugging his shoulders after no one responded, he went down into the basement to grab the sketchbook, expecting to meet Mike down there doing chemistry homework or working on the next campaign, lounging on the basement couch.

But he wasn't down there, which was strange because Mike practically lived in the basement. The next thing he noticed was a leather jacket that was lying slack on the couch. Was Lucas wearing that during the campaign? Will shut his eyes trying to remember if he was wearing a jacket, but he couldn't picture it. So Will grabbed his sketchbook and went back upstairs. The third unusual thing he noticed, was that Nancy was home and talking with her mother. (Will couldn't remember the last time that happened, either.)

"I can't believe you talked me into this, Nancy." Mrs. Wheeler lamented. "He's going to get himself killed."

Nancy laughed, waving to Will as he came into the kitchen. "I think it'll be okay Mom. Mike's not stupid."

"Where is he anyway?" Will asked. The two women turned to look at them as Mrs. Wheeler threw a dish towel down in frustration.

"In the garage." Nancy told him.

"Getting himself killed." Mrs. Wheeler said under her breath.

"How's he doing that, Mom?" Nancy asked her. "He's just in the garage tinkering with the damn thing."

"I shouldn't have let you do this. Why did your father not say no to this?" Mrs. Wheeler pressed her hands to her forehead.

"He said Mike deserved something nice for becoming the valedictorian, and he didn't want another car in the garage. You said you agreed with Dad, remember?"

"Yes, Nancy, I remember. But I didn't think you meant this! It's certainly not what I thought you would buy with all that money."

"You're not going to make me return it, right?" Nancy looked between Will and her mother. "He's totally in love with the thing."

"In love with what thing?" Will asked, tired of not understanding where this conversation was going.

Mrs. Wheeler waved him off. "At least Jonathan looks after you. I wouldn't expect him to pull a stunt like this." she turned her glare on Nancy.

"I don't have any idea what you're talking about." Will told her, as politely as he could.

"Come on, Will. I'll show you." Nancy hopped off her kitchen stool and led Will down the hall. As they walked, Will heard rock music getting louder as they walked toward the garage. His eyebrows furrowed because as they walked, there were sounds coming from the Wheeler garage he'd never heard, whirring and buzzing that made the place sound like a real car garage. Suddenly Will was remembering when Lonnie still lived with them and was always working on restoring old cars if he wasn't drunk out of his mind.

Nancy knocked just loudly enough to be heard over the music. "Mike!" she shouted, and Will stepped to the side rubbing his ear, "I'm coming in."

"Okay!" they heard Mike yell back.

Nancy opened the door and stepped to the side, letting Will into the stuffy heat of the garage. He took in the area surrounding him. He saw Mr. Wheeler's old Mustang and the station wagon Mrs. Wheeler drove around town. But what he saw next made his mouth drop

open.

“What the...” he trailed off as Mike came into view. Will didn’t really see him, his eyes still glued to what Mike had been working on.

“Oh hey, Will.” Mike said, wiping grease off his forehead with the back of his hand. He had his sleeves rolled up, his arms covered in sweat and grime. It was honestly the last look Will could have guessed Mike was sporting that day. He looked from Mike, to Mike’s project, and back to Mike again

“You are going to get yourself killed.” Will muttered.

“Huh?” Mike sat on the hood of the station wagon. “Oh yeah, that.” he looked back over his shoulder and then back to him and Nancy, who was looking super smug standing next to him. “Look you can’t tell El.”

Once Will finally managed to get his jaw from up the floor, he narrowed his eyes at his friend. “Wait, why?”

“It’s supposed to be a surprise for her.” he explained, as if it was the most obvious things in the world.

“How is *this* supposed to be a surprise for her?” asked Will, full on flabbergasted.

“Oh he’s got this whole thing planned for her so he can sweep her off her feet and everything.” Nancy told them with mischievous smile.

“Okay,” Will muttered, “but haven’t you already done that? Friendly reminder that that’s all she thinks you ever do!”

“I just think it will be fun for her, okay! So you *can’t* tell her.” Mike emphasized, eyes wide and wild. “I need your word.”

“Why, do you think I was just planning on going home and letting Eleven know everything?” Will glared at Mike, who raised an eyebrow.

“Were you planning on going home and letting Eleven know everything?”

“...Maybe. But I still don’t really see her enjoying any of this so-”

“Please, Will!” Mike begged. It looked like he was about to fall off the station wagon and get on his knees. “You have to swear you won’t tell her *anything* , okay? I need you to swear! On your grave!”

Will sighed in exasperation. “I don’t think this is a good idea, Mike-”

“Will!” Mike whined, and Will now knew where Eleven had picked that habit up. “C’mon man, just help me out.”

“Okay fine.” Will sighed again.

“Yes!” Mike jumped up.

“How long do you need me to keep your secret?” asked Will. He shifted on his two feet, not exactly looking forward to keeping something from his sister.

“Just a couple of days. I have to get this thing up and running so only until then.”

Will sighed again. “You’ve got to be kidding me. I didn’t even know you were into this kind of thing, Mike.”

“Well, I’m not really. My dad’s been helping me. So, are you going to tell El or...”

“No, I won’t tell her.” Will relented. Mike’s shoulders fell and a huge grin took over his face.

“Thanks Will, you won’t regret this!” Mike clapped him on the back.

“Are you supposed to be sweating that much?” Will asked, but Mike had gone back to his project.

Will did regret it. He would regret it, a lot, as it turned out, and he knew he would as he walked out of the Wheeler house, wondering how this would play out. Will couldn’t even keep a surprise party from Eleven, how was this time any different? He did wonder though, how El would react. This was out of character for Mike. Way out of character.

Now keeping secrets had come back to bite both of them. Mike deciding to wear the new leather jacket Nancy had bought for him to school without letting anybody else in on the secret led the rest of the student body to believe Mike had adopted a bad boy attitude. It also put him on Becky Marshall's radar, despite the fact that she'd never even had heard his name the week before. Then Mike made the stupid decision to hang out in Becky Marshall's science class and the rumors had boiled over. Suddenly Mike was cheating on the girl he had previously been dating, but no one could ever remember her name, and then he'd dumped that nameless girl for Becky.

After El and Max confronted Becky and her friends in the library, Will knew he wasn't going to be able to keep Mike's secret for long. Immediately, he'd ran off towards the art room when she first questioned him, but once he knew he was no longer in El's sight, he'd gone to hunt down Mike in the parking lot.

"I can't keep this a secret anymore!" Will told him.

Mike ran his hand through his hair. "It's just a few more days."

"I don't think you have anymore days."

And he was right. He drove El home and for twenty solid minutes she interrogated him. Then she used Will's own boyfriend as her own little spy to try and sneak what was happening. Then when Will had caught Eleven, she'd *cried*. Will decided then to call Mike because shit had hit the fan long ago. Now here she was, wondering if Max was murdering him. So the second El went back to her room, it was Will's turn on the phone.

"You need to get over here, and now!"

"Wait, why?" Mike asked.

"Just come over Mike!" Will yelled into the receiver. Mike was mumbling something on the other line. But Will had just decided he was done with this whole Mike thing, and he was done keeping secrets. Until he turned around in the kitchen to come face to face with his mom.

“Hi, honey.” she smiled, “How was your afternoon? Do anything fun?”

Will gulped. So maybe he wasn’t done keeping secrets.

At least not from El.

-

“You need to change clothes.” Will announced as he came into El’s bedroom.

Putting her copy of *Hamlet* down, El narrowed her eyes at her brother. She could find “textual evidence” later. “What?” she asked, “why? What’s wrong with what I’m wearing now?” El’s current outfit was her favorite outfit: a big oversized t-shirt and sweatpants. El liked to dress up and feel pretty, but she also liked those moments where it was late, all her family was home, and she could lounge around doing homework and watching TV, all in pajamas.

Will shrugged. “It won’t work for the surprise.” he said, coming to sit on her comforter.

“What surprise-oh...” A smile came over El’s face as she remembered, and Will nodded. El inched forward on the bed towards her brother.

“Can you tell me what it is so I’ll know what to wear?” she asked with eager eyes.

“Oh, is that the best you can do,” Will asked, feigning offense, “You didn’t even try to be sneaky that time. I’m taking fifteen points off for that.”

El pouted. “You sound like Mike when you say that. But seriously, what should I wear, Will the All Knowing?”

“Um, first of all it’s Will the *Wise*, second of all you should know that, third you need to wear jeans.”

“Jeans? Why jeans?” asked El as her brother was getting up from her bed.



“Just trust me, okay?” Will gave her a knowing look and she bit her lip. Then he left, and El was left to her own devices and the task of finding a clean pair of jeans somewhere in her heaping mess of a room. It had been a quiet Saturday so far. El couldn’t get a hold of Max after she had hung up on her, and she worried for most of the day that Max had done or said something to Mike that had ended with Mike in a cast, because she couldn’t get a hold of Mike either. When she called it was Nancy, of all people, picked up the other line.

“Nancy? Aren’t you supposed to be in New York?” she had asked.

Nancy laughed into the receiver. “Sort of. Steve and me came on a sort of sabbatical. Jonathan had to stay to watch Murphy, but he sends his regards.”

“Who’s Murphy?” El wondered out loud.

“Oh he’s the cocker spaniel we adopted!” Nancy told her excitedly. Leave it to the three of them to adopt a dog and ignore her requests for a niece or nephew. “He’s only a puppy and he has a tendency to destroy the apartment when we’re not there. Steve only got to come with me because part of this was his idea.”

“Murphy... Wait what was his idea?”

Nancy didn’t miss a beat. “Nothing, just a little thing we wanted to put together for Mike.”

So now El had three hints about what Mike was doing behind her back. A leather jacket, something that wasn’t horrifying for their relationship, and the possibility that Nancy and Steve had put it together. And now she had to be wearing jeans.

Eventually after digging in the bottom of her drawer and spilling all the rest of her clothes onto the floor around her, she found a pair of acid washed jeans. She waltzed into the living room to find Will sketching on the couch.

“Does this work?” she spun around but Will only lifted an eyebrow and nodded. “Did Hopper and Joyce leave?”

“Flo’s having some sort of housewarming tonight. They shouldn’t be

home for a few hours. And that's a good thing because there's *no way in hell* Hop would approve of this." he added under his breath with wide eyes.

El was about to ask her brother was specifically he had meant by that comment, but she was caught off guard mid breath by the sound of an engine revving, approaching the house as the striking sound came closer. "What was that?" she asked when the sound cut off. A heavy silence fell between her and brother.

"That-" Will told her as they heard the sound of the engine start up and die again. "Is your boyfriend."

"*What?*" El ran up to window, looking in between the blinds, but Mike was nowhere in sight. She threw one last look at Will before she ran out the front door. He didn't come with her. El looked around the gravel driveway, half expecting to find him dead.

"Hey, El.

She whirled around to find her boyfriend in a black leather jacket and helmet, standing next to a *motorcycle*, of all things . The bike was a solid black with chrome accents and handle bars. She could see her shocked expression in the body of the bike. And then there was Mike, leaning on the thing and in that damn jacket. El's eyes widened at the sight of. When Will said surprise, El had expected something soft or gentle, not the hottest thing she'd ever seen in her life, and the jacket had definitely worth that wait.

There was *no way in hell* that Becky Marshall was going to take him from her.

El was debating whether she should just keep standing their liked a shocked idiot or whether she should tackle her boyfriend and kiss him as hard as she could when he bent down behind the bike (El was definitely not staring at his ass, what were you talking about?) and pulled another helmet. Pink, of course.

"Hop on," he said, "we only have a few hours." He took her hand and brought her to the bike. She followed his moves, putting the helmet on and straddling the bike slowly. She wanted to ask if he knew what

he was doing, if she could ever stop with the hungry stare.

“Are you ready?” he shouted, excitement oozing out of his voice.

“Um... sure, Mike do you know what you’re doing-” but she couldn’t finish her question, because the engine had roared to life again. Mike gave the bike some gas and then they were out of the Byers’ gravel driveway. El grabbed onto Mike and buried her head in his shoulder.

“Are you okay?” Mike shouted as they turned.

“Yes!” El managed to say without screaming. Mike was increasing their speed and El tightened her grip.

She couldn’t say why, but she couldn’t bring herself to open her eyes as Mike navigated the twists and turns of the neighborhood taking them away from Maple Street. All she could see behind her shut eyelids was them in the mix of a spectacular explosion. The fire was blinding, there was blood, there was shattered glass and metal and-

“El!” Mike was shouting, “It’s okay, I’ve got you!”

*“Hop on, we’ve only got a few hours.”*

El opened her eyes. Mike took them around another street corner. Taking a deep breath, El opened her eyes. All around her, Hawkins was only a blur as Mike accelerated, leaving the buildings, the townspeople, their history all behind them as Mike drove past the *Now leaving Hawkins* sign, still left hanging upside down after all these years.

Before them lay a straight road, unlike all the others from before. Mike revved on the engine and they were off. El looked all around her, looking past the speeding sky and rushing treetops. Every second amazed her, every minute she wished they were going faster and faster. It was Mike who seemed to be reading her mind this time, as he accelerated the bike.

El was twelve years old again. In that moment, it was just the two of them on the bike, riding through forest looking for Will, riding through Hawkins as she saw everything for the first time, finally tasting freedom. In the years that followed, El had learned to ride her

own bike, but it wasn't the same. She could ride next to Mike but not with him, and is independent as she was hell bent on beating, there was a certain safety with Mike she still had yet to find in someone else. And here they were, easily going 80 on the highway, and El had never felt safer. She soaked in every surrounding, the feel of the wind on her face and the smell of her boyfriend and his silly (and ridiculously hot) leather jacket.

And then she let go. El spread her arms out like they were wings and she could fly. She laughed loudly and it faded into the wind, gone forever. El felt every molecule, it seemed. Mike was slowing down, weaving in between cars and laughing along with her.

Because something about this just felt right. Yes, they had all outgrown the bikes eventually and made moves to learn how to drive. Mike had been the first to turn sixteen and became the designated chauffeur for their gang. El had loved being in Mike's car, and not because they spent a lot of time in the back seat making out or doing the same thing but on the roof of his car, because it was so him. It was messy with scientific observations he had scribbled quickly and notes covered with her handwriting. But the famous Vista Cruiser then went up in flames. By accident, Mike had left his keys out in the locker room and Troy had stolen them, bent on getting his revenge after Mike had "accidentally" pushed Troy into the punch bowl at homecoming, punishment for trying to flirt with El. Troy had then taken the Vista Cruiser for a spin of his own in the teacher's parking lot, and totaled the car when he hit a telephone poll. The Wheeler's were furious, Troy was expelled, and there had been talk of a replacement car while everyone carpooled with Lucas in his chevy. El had *no* idea how Nancy and Steve had put this together, but she thought she might as well give them her first born child. It was just the two of them again, and rightfully so.

"This is amazing!" El yelled, her grip on Mike tighter but not for the reasons from before.

Mike merged onto a side road, and then slowed down just enough for him to yell "I've been waiting to tell you all week!"

El smiled into her boyfriend's shoulder. Relief spread through her veins. Even though Will had sworn on his grave that Mike was not

cheating on her, actual confirmation from the boy himself meant more than he'd ever known.

They cruised at what El thought was about forty miles on the side road, until he turned them around and pulled over to a stop.

"That was amazing!" El shouted again as she took off her helmet, "you're amazing!"

Mike took off his own helmet and she could see him blushing, to her own satisfaction. "Thanks, but-"

He didn't get to finish, because El had yanked on his leather jacket and kissed him hard. His hands found their way into her hair as the kiss deepened, Mike trying not to smile too much and focus on his girlfriend. It didn't feel like she could pull herself any closer to Mike, but she did it anyway.

When she finally let up to let him breathe, Mike was staring at her with wild eyes. "Wow." he said, smiling and nuzzling her nose, "what was that?"

El kissed his lips quickly. "A thank you for the ride."

"So I'm guessing you enjoyed it?" Mike asked, and she could hear the telltale sign of his pride in his voice. She looked up at his face, seeing the same expression he wore all those years ago when he had first kissed her.

"Mmhmm." she nodded, her own eyes hungry.

"I thought you would. Will didn't think so."

"Oh, I can't even believe he managed to keep it secret!" laughed El into Mike's shoulder.

"Yeah neither could I." his hands came back to her waist. "Remember when he ruined your birthday party?"

El nodded in remembrance. "So why'd you wait so long to tell me?" What she really wanted to ask was how come Will knew and not her, but she thought that being petty might ruin the moment.

“The bike didn’t work at first, when Nancy and Steve brought it home it was practically dead. I’m surprised the my dad and I actually got the thing working again. And then I had to learn how to ride it. I fell off a few times.” Mike admitted. El’s nose scrunched up as she laughed. Mike brushed a piece hair behind her ear. He kissed her slowly on the lips, and she could feel herself melting in his arms. She sighed into the kiss, this time she was the one trying not to smile too much, but she just couldn’t. Finally she pulled away and started laughing.

“What’s so funny?” Mike asked, their foreheads touching.

“This whole time I’d thought I’d lost you, and I’m just really glad that this wasn’t what I thought it was.”

“What did you think this was?” his eyebrows furrowed at the word “lost”.

“You and this stupid jacket.” El yanked on it again, but she was still smiling like an idiot. “ You were avoiding me and everyone was saying you turned to the dark side. You made me think that I’d lost that boy who quoted Yoda to me the first time he had me alone.”

“El, if the question you’re asking is am I still a dork, then the answer is yes.” he laughed, and she rolled her eyes.

“I’m being serious!” She glared at him. El was trying to keep up this angry front, but he was making it hard being so close and so damn adorable. “I didn’t fall in love you with the boy who mouths off to teachers and pushes coaches and walks around wearing a really sexy leather jacket. I fell in love with the boy who can quote Back to the Future forward and back to me and still has a dinosaur toy named Rory next to all his science fair trophies.”

“El, nothing has changed about me. I promise. I don’t know who was telling you I was being an ass to teachers because that *never* happened. I would never push a coach, I don’t have a death wish. What’d you say the jacket was?”

“Sexy, Mike, but I thought it was changing you. Please tell me that will never happen, okay? I don’t want to lose the real you.” she

whispered.

His voice dropped. "I promise." he said, kissing her forehead. "And don't worry. If I had to pick between this jacket and Rory, I'd chose Rory. He was the first thing you thought was impressive about me."

El scoffed, trying- and failing- not to laugh. "I was not impressed with your dinosaur toy, Michael Wheeler!"

"Well, obviously you were, because here we are now!" Mike laughed. "But don't believe those rumors, El. Because none of them are true."

"Does that include the one where you're cheating on me?"

"Where I'm doing *what* now?"

"The whole school thinks that you were cheating on me. And that you dumped me for another girl." El told him. His mouth dropped open.

"*Why* would I cheat on you? That's like winning the lottery and gambling it all the way! I'm not Lucas or Max or Dustin!" El just laughed into his shoulder.

"So who was I cheating on you with?" he asked, running his hands through his hair.

El smirked. "Becky Marshall."

"Becky who?" Mike's eyebrows furrowed. Now it was El's turn to be shocked.

"Wait, you don't know Becky?" she stared at him, flabbergasted.

"Who's Becky?" He asked, and El could tell from his wide eyes and scrunched up shoulders that he honestly had no clue who she was talking about.

"Redhead? Super curly hair?" El listed off, but Mike shook his head. "She's a junior and she's fallen head over heels in love with you because of your jacket? She's always being followed by a blonde girl and a really squeaky brunette?"

“Oh! I know who you’re talking about!” A look of recognition came over his face. “ But I thought her name was Vanessa!”

And that was that. El had spent a whole forty eight hours worrying if her boyfriend was cheating on her with a terrible girl when he couldn’t even remember her name.

“Her name is Becky, Mike.” El said, trying not to laugh.

“I could have sworn her name was Vanessa! My next guess would have been Charlotte...” he trailed off and El burst into laughter.

“So why then, if you’re not cheating on me with Becky/Vanessa, have you been avoiding me all week, Mike Wheeler?”

“Okay so we both know Will had a hard time keeping it a secret, but I knew that if I saw you, the whole thing would be off because I would just tell you or let you guess until you got it. It’s really hard not to tell you everything, especially since I’m so used to talking to you. This week has been hell not seeing you. I really wanted to see but I also wanted this to be a surprise. I’m sorry if I hurt you, El.” Mike admitted. El sighed, pulling him by his jacket until their foreheads were touching.

“It’s okay, Mike. There was no real harm done. I missed you too.” she assured him, and felt his shoulders relax. “But I do have one more question.”

“Yeah?” he asked.

“What were you doing in Becky’s physics class? She said you helped her with some of the work. And how did Max not tell you all this already? I thought she was going to your house to “kick your ass.” El explained.

“Max did come over yesterday, and she did start to yell at me, which was the most terrifying thing that’s ever happened to me. But she took one look at the bike and just started laughing, and then she left. Oh, and I just started this teacher’s aid thing with Mr. Needham. I’ve been sneaking out of some classes where the teachers didn’t really need me in and tutoring the under classmen. Plus Mr. Needham was



helping me figure out how to restart her engine.” Mike gestured to the bike. “I swear to God I can’t remember someone named Becky in that class, though.”

“Maybe she just didn’t leave that much of an impression?” El smiled up at her boyfriend.

Mike kissed her again, leaving her breathless. “I guess she didn’t.”

After breaking away, Mike handed El her helmet, telling her that he should probably get her home. They climb back on the bike, and before she knows they’re on the highway again, all of her previous worries gone, fading as the ride straight into the setting sun.

-

“So Mike has a *motorcycle*? ” Dustin asked again, and Max rolled her eyes.

“I just said that, dumbass.” Max said, tired of repeating the story.

“Jesus, Max, no need for you to be rude. Sinclair, do you have any threes?”

“Go fish.” Lucas shrugged and Dustin reached over to get another card. They were sitting in the school foyer, just waiting for the bell to ring that would let the under classmen out and they could finally get to rehearsal. Until then they were stuck with only a deck of cards to entertain them and satisfy their need to bet money on things.

“Max, you got any fours?” Lucas asked her, but she shook her head.

“Go fish.”

“So I guess Mike wasn’t cheating after all.” said Lucas as he reached to shuffle the deck again.

“According to El he couldn’t even remember Becky’s name. I’d like to see the look on her face when that gets back her.” Max laughed.

“Or that Mike is still faithful to El.” Dustin added.

"That's gonna be fucking hysterical." smiled Max. "Dustin, do you have any twos?"

Sighing, Dustin surrendered three of his cards. "Do you think Rachel would be impressed if I got a motorcycle?" he wondered out loud.

"You'd just be copying Mike at this point. I think Rachel will just be impressed with the fact that you got Ryan kicked out the troupe. Does this mean when can use a sock hanging from the ceiling as Old Hamlet now?" Lucas asked

"That's still a no, unfortunately." Dustin told him.

"Damn," Lucas cursed "That was a golden idea, Henderson. Why do shoot down true artistry like that?"

"Because true artistry doesn't smell like a gym sock, Lucas."

"So what does this mean for our bet?" Max asked, looking at the two boys. "Is it off the table? You got any nines, Henderson?"

"Go fish. And I don't think it is." Dustin shook his head.

Lucas raised an eyebrow. "How can it still stand? We know Mike wasn't really doing something too stupid because everything worked out in his favor. Everybody loves him now because of that stupid jacket, and his sister bought him a freaking motorcycle. And since Mike wasn't cheating on El with Becky *or* science, how does science come into this at all?"

"Remember? Max said Mike was only hanging around the Becky's science class because he was an aid and wanted help with the bike's engine. Ta dah, science, my dear Horatio." Dustin claps him on the back.

"Don't call me that in public, Henderson" is all Lucas can answer with.

"Time to pay up you two." Dustin holds his hand out and they both roll their eyes, reaching into their wallets and handing him fifty dollars.

"Thank you, my dear friends. Rachel and I are going to have a lovely date this weekend, and we appreciate your labors."

"Shut the hell up." Max rolled her eyes and told Dustin the same time Lucas added "I should punch you in the face."

"Hey guys, look who it is!" They followed Dustin's line of sight until they saw Mike and El coming toward them in the mass of students, El wearing the leather jacket draped over her shoulders and holding Mike's hand. "Looks like they survived after all."

"Hey," Max gestured her head to another mass of people, "look who's over there. Yo, Becky!" she shouted and pointed in Mike and El's direction. "Look!"

Becky did, and as she saw El in the jacket *and* holding Mike's hand, the anger that come over her face made Max almost fall off the step she was sitting on she was laughing so hard. Becky had turned an ugly beet red. It was like the world had betrayed her poor, poor soul. She slammed her high heel into Shannon's foot as she stomped like a four year old throwing a tantrum, throwing a super scary look back at Max and the boys.

"Boo-hoo, Becky!" Max laughed as Lucas and Dustin shouted "Ohhhhhhhhh!" Max dragging both her middle fingers down her cheeks as if was crying.

Becky stormed off, followed by a limping Shannon who looked even angrier than Becky and Janet, who smiled and waved at them.

"Ahh, poetic justice." sighed Dustin, a large smile on his face.

"It truly is amazing." Max high fived her friends.

"It fucking is." Lucas added, then he stared down the hallway where El was leaning up against the lockers, jacket still hanging over her shoulders, looking up at Mike like he was her entire world. "Hey guys," he smiled, successfully having grabbed their attention, "wanna put money on when they're gonna get married?"

## **Notes for the Chapter:**

I hope I delivered!!!!

song for title: devil's in the backseat by lostboycrew  
(amazing song that makes Mike and El look a lot edgier than they actually are, still the song worked as a title :)

references sprinkled here and there:

Max's "if you mean I could stand in a puddle and not get my feet wet" line is reference to Danny Phantom. If you got it, then you had a good childhood.

Max's "I'm going to kick Mike Wheeler's ass right now" is a reference to That 70's Show and so is the Vista Cruiser Mike drives and Troy crashes.

Lucas' idea to hang a sock puppet from the ceiling as old hamlet is a reference to The Complete Works of Shakespeare.

## **Author's Note:**

special thank you to me beta!

title inspiration: devil's in the backseat- lostboycrew  
thank you once again for reading! please tell me what you think, I'd love to hear it (and it would help, a lot)

mwah, savannah